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# FIGURING ON THE COST OF YOUR HOUSE

BY GEORGE E. WALSH

NINE out of ten people who build homes find the cost mounting rapidly above the original estimates of architect and contractor, and by the time the job is finished the owner is lucky if the cost isn't greater than twenty per cent. over what he first planned to pay for it. Architects can not tell in advance the exact cost; neither can the builders. They both make snap estimates, and the latter adds ten or twenty per cent. to leave a good margin of safety for himself.

## ESTIMATING

Snap estimates are made by the square foot or cubical contents of the house. The latter is preferable to the former. If the house is 26 by 40 feet, the number of square feet will be 1,040. Now if in your locality builders use the \$3 per square foot as the unit of price, the house will cost \$3,120. That is for a common frame house. If it is built of brick, the contractor would be apt to take \$4 a square foot as the unit of cost, and figure the estimate at \$4,160.

The estimate based on the cubical contents is better, but this involves more figuring. If the same house is 30 feet high from the bottom of the cellar to the peak, you will have a cubage of 31,200. No allowance is made for parts of it being cut off by sloping roofs and extensions only one story high. It is safer to estimate on a cubical box of this size. The rest would be easy if we could find a standard unit of cost per cubic foot; but this may vary from 15 cents for a frame house to 18 and 20 cents for a stucco and frame; to 22 and 26 cents for brick and terra cotta, and 30 cents for a solid stone house.

So you have a very elastic cubical estimate, ranging from \$4,680 to \$9,360. You ask why the cubical estimate on the frame house is so much higher than the estimate on the number of square feet in it. Simply because in the first instance the builder estimated practically on a two-story house, or at least with the third unfinished, but in the cubical estimate a three story, all finished off, was taken as the guide.

But after you have made an estimate by the cubage method, there are many other things to consider. You must learn to accept materials in harmony with the class of house you are building. If you want all hardwood finish, fancy plumbing, the most expensive kind of heating plant, and elegant lighting fixtures, your estimate will be way off the figures you are called upon finally to pay.

## PLUMBING

When a small house is planned, it is estimated that in plain, appropriate plumbing each fixture should cost about \$50 to \$75, which means a bathroom with three fixtures, and a kitchen sink and laundry tray, or a total outlay for the five fixtures of \$250 to \$375. In a larger and handsome residence the fixtures will be estimated at \$100 each, and there may be more than the regulation five. You can see how easily the cost may mount up if you have a special fancy for beautiful plumbing and a lot of it.

## HEATING PLANTS

Next consider the heating plant. The hot-air furnace is the cheapest. It is usually estimated on the number of registers supplied. Each outlet will run in cost from \$20 to \$30. If there are twenty outlets, your heating plant may cost all the way from \$400 to \$600; but for a small house ten or twelve outlets are usually sufficient to heat all the rooms and halls, making a total of \$200 to \$300. For steam heating on a small house the cost averages about \$30 per radiator, and on a large house \$40; but if you want anything fancy you can easily guess what the extra cost will be. For hot water the cost averages 20 per cent. more than for steam owing to the larger pipes and radiators needed, and if you want the "indirect" system of steam or hot water you will pay 50 per cent. more than for the "direct" system.

## LIGHTING

The lighting part of the house is worth considering. For estimating electricity, you must allow about \$2 per outlet, or \$40 for twenty outlets in a small house, and \$1.50 to \$1.75 for gas per outlet. But that does not include chandeliers and lighting fixtures. It simply includes the laying of the pipes or the wiring of the house. You can spend from \$2 to \$20 for each lighting fixture if you choose. The builder never includes chandeliers in his estimates. He allows a lump sum for them, and you may be sure your desires in this respect will outrun the amount he has arbitrarily set down for you.

## WINDOWS

Few prospective builders consider doors and windows. "Give me a house with all windows," some one says. "I need all the light and sunshine I can get in the home." Exactly, but you must pay for it. In basing his estimate on the cubage of the house the architect and builder figured on as few windows as they possibly could. All the rest are extras. Now each extra window will cost you from \$5 to \$10, and an extra door slightly more. Then, too, you must consider the screens, storm windows, shades and curtains. The cheapest window screen will be \$1.20 and door \$3, and the best quality of each will run more than two or three times as much. Storm windows cost from \$1.50 to \$3, and window shades from 50 cents to \$1 per window. And curtains—well, nobody but the wife can figure on them, and they are beyond the comprehension of the male mind.

## STOCK DOORS AND WINDOWS

Stock doors and windows are the cheapest, but if you want extra large or unusual sizes you must pay two or three times as much for them. Good stock doors and windows come in great variety of sizes, but it is easy in carrying out your wishes to miss every one, and pay double for your ignorance. Get a list of stock sizes, and then make your openings fit some of these. Finally, be sure that you are over rather than under the final cost.